

A Federal Career Guide for Interns and Recent Graduates

What to Expect and How to Succeed in the Program



A FEDERAL CAREER GUIDE FOR INTERNS AND RECENT GRADUATES



What to Expect and How to Succeed in the Program

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| I. | INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| II. | GENERAL INFORMATION | 5 |
| A. | BENEFITS | 5 |
| B. | ORIENTATION..... | 5 |
| C. | TELEWORK..... | 6 |
| D. | TRANSIT SUBSIDY PROGRAM..... | 6 |
| E. | WORK EXPECTATIONS..... | 6 |
| III. | INTERNSHIP PROGRAM..... | 7 |
| A. | WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?..... | 7 |
| 1. | Participant Agreement..... | 7 |
| 2. | Individual Development Plan (IDP) | 8 |
| 3. | Training and Development..... | 8 |
| 4. | Rotational Assignments | 8 |
| 5. | Mentors | 9 |
| 6. | Schedules | 9 |
| 7. | Performance Evaluation..... | 9 |
| 8. | Promotions | 10 |
| 9. | Conversion Eligibility..... | 10 |
| B. | WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR | 11 |
| C. | FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) | 11 |
| D. | SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP | 13 |
| IV. | RECENT GRADUATES PROGRAM..... | 16 |
| A. | WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?..... | 16 |
| 1. | Participant Agreement..... | 16 |
| 2. | Individual Development Plan (IDP) | 17 |
| 3. | Training and Development..... | 17 |
| 4. | Rotational Assignments | 17 |
| 5. | Mentors | 18 |
| 6. | Schedules | 18 |
| 7. | Performance Evaluation..... | 18 |
| 8. | Promotions | 19 |
| 9. | Conversion Eligibility..... | 19 |
| B. | WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR | 19 |
| C. | FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) | 20 |
| D. | SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER..... | 21 |

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| V. | GLOSSARY OF TERMS..... | 23 |
| VI. | RESOURCES | 25 |
| A. | TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP) | 25 |
| VII. | CONCLUSION..... | 26 |

I. INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your selection as a Pathways Intern or Pathways Recent Graduate!

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) prescribes regulations for the Pathways Programs (Programs) and has an oversight role to ensure that agencies comply with the regulations. The Recruitment Policy and Outreach (RPO) Office at OPM is dedicated to supporting the implementation and use of the Programs across the Federal Government.

We developed this Career Guide (Guide) to provide you practical insight and information to help you navigate your new Federal career. Your agency can provide you with additional guidance and resources on the Programs. Also, each agency has a Pathways Programs Officer (PPO) that can answer any questions about these programs. For additional support, contact RPO at pathways@opm.gov.

BACKGROUND

In 2010, President Obama signed [Executive Order 13562](#), “Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates,” which established the Internship and Recent Graduates Programs (and enhanced the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program).

These Programs were designed to help agencies recruit and hire well-qualified students and recent graduates by streamlining processes and providing applicants with clear paths to internships and full-time employment, as well as meaningful training, mentoring and career-development opportunities.

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

A. BENEFITS

The Federal Government offers many benefits to its employees, a few of which are described below. Go to <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/benefits/> for additional information on benefits for Federal workers.

Coverage for health and life insurance for participants in the Programs depends on the type of Pathways appointment and the expectation of substantial employment during the year.

Students hired under a Recent Graduates or Internship appointment for a period expected to last longer than one year are eligible for health and life insurance coverage, so long as they are also expected to be in a pay status for at least one-third of the total period of time from the date of their initial appointment to the date of completion of their respective Program.

The cost of premiums is split between the employee and the agency, as is the case for all permanent employees. Pathways participants that work part-time will be responsible for a larger share of their health insurance premiums than full-time Pathways participants.

When an employee on a temporary appointment, a seasonal schedule of less than six months per year, or an intermittent schedule is expected to work 130 hours per month or more for at least 90 days, the employee is eligible to enroll in a Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) plan and receive the same Government contribution as full-time permanent employees. These newly eligible employees will receive the same Government contribution as full-time permanent employees.

B. ORIENTATION

Orientation is an important part of a Pathways participant's experience. In addition to helping you learn about the benefits associated with your appointment and ensuring that you complete various forms, orientation is an opportunity to become familiar with key agency points of contact for questions that will inevitably arise during your tenure, as well as information about specific Programs, including roles and responsibilities.

OPM encourages agencies to provide orientations for Interns and Recent Graduates. These sessions may address Program requirements and expectations; tips for maximizing participation in the Program; and/or agency stakeholders, processes and culture. The hours spent in this training may count towards the required 40 hours of formal interactive training per year for Recent Graduates Program participants. Contact your agency PPO if you have questions about orientation activities.

C. TELEWORK

Depending upon your agency's policy and individual circumstances, you may be eligible for telework. If you are, agencies will have you follow their agency-specific telework policy. If telework is permitted, it will be included in your Participant Agreement. This is something you should discuss with your supervisor. The nature of some jobs is such that teleworking is not an option.

D. TRANSIT SUBSIDY PROGRAM

The objective of the Federal Transit Subsidy Program is to reduce pollution and traffic congestion and to encourage Federal employees to use public transportation on a regular and ongoing basis.

Federal employees committed to using mass transportation for their commutes from home to work and return home are eligible to receive the Federal transit benefit. The amount of benefits you receive is based on where you live and is not designed to cover all your travel costs. The transit benefit is a subsidy, not an entitlement. You can help ensure the continued availability of Federal transit benefits in the future by following a few basic rules:

- A. Apply using your agency's established application process
- B. Spend the transit benefit to make a direct purchase through your transit authority
- C. Ride mass transportation for the bulk of your own home to work and return commutes
- D. Comply with your agency's Transit Subsidy Program policy

If you are interested in participating in the Transit Subsidy Program, speak with your supervisor or PPO to find out how to apply.

E. WORK EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to arrive at work on time. This means you should be at your work station at the start of your tour. Your work will depend on your agency and position. Your supervisor will explain expectations, work assignments, review completed work and establish performance metrics. Typically, your supervisor will provide you with a performance plan that explains your duties and expectations. You should complete your work timely and efficiently and if you don't understand something, ask for clarity. Notify your supervisor when you complete your assignments. He or she will also provide performance feedback and assist with professional development opportunities.

As a public servant, you will be held to a high standard. Therefore, you should act in the most professional and ethical manner possible. Agencies may terminate participants' employment for misconduct, suitability or poor performance during or at the end of the program period.

All Federal employees have a duty to preserve and protect Government property and should not use Government property for other than authorized purposes. This property includes items such

as office supplies, telephones, other telecommunications equipment, printers, and Government vehicles. While occasional personal use of telecommunications equipment and computers is acceptable, you should adhere to your agency's policies. Questions related to the appropriate use of Government property should be addressed with your supervisor.

III. INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Internship Program provides students who are enrolled in or accepted for enrollment in a wide variety of qualifying educational institutions with paid opportunities to work either part- or full-time in agencies and explore career paths related to their academic fields of study or career interests.

There are two types of Interns. The “**Intern Not-to-Exceed (NTE)**” is a current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is not expected to last more than one year. The “**Intern**” is a current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is expected to last more than one year, typically through academic completion.

Students who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position anywhere in the Federal Government.

A. WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

A great internship provides you with the knowledge and skills required to become successful in your career field. The Pathways Internship Program was designed to give you hands-on work experience that will help propel your career forward. This is a great opportunity for you to demonstrate your skills, creativity and professional potential, which could lead to a permanent position in the Federal Government.

1. Participant Agreement

Agencies must enter into a written agreement with each Pathways participant that they employ. This agreement is typically signed by you, your supervisor, and a human resources (HR) specialist. The agreement must include expectations and define the following:

- A general description of the duties to be performed;
- Work schedule;
- Length of the appointment and termination date;
- Mentorship opportunities;
- Training requirements;
- Evaluation procedures;
- Requirements for continuation and successful completion of the Program;
- Minimum eligibility requirements for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service; and
- Any other requirements or expectations established by the agency.

Your agency may customize the Participant Agreement to incorporate additional components such as points of contact at participants' educational institutions. Refer to Appendix B for a sample Intern Participant Agreement.

2. Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is a formal plan developed jointly by you and your supervisor. It is your strategic roadmap to create and track your career planning, professional development, and training activities. It should make note of your target position, learning objectives, and developmental requirements.

IDPs should be structured around the following elements:

- **Target Position or Portfolio:** A brief description of the target position or portfolio, and the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that will be needed to qualify for it upon successful completion of the Internship Program.
- **Learning Objectives:** A description of general competencies, as well as specific technical skills and experiences.
- **Details and Timelines:** An overview of when and how the learning objectives will be met through participation in required trainings and other developmental activities.
- **Demonstrated Success:** A means for tracking the completion of all IDP objectives. You and your supervisor are partners in determining whether the objectives set forth in the IDP have been met at the end of the Internship Program.

You are not required to complete an IDP if you plan to work for a short period of time (e.g., summer break). However, OPM recommends that each Intern in an appointment lasting 90 days or more be placed on one. Refer to Section VI for tips on how to complete an IDP and Appendix A for a sample IDP.

3. Training and Development

Formal interactive training is not required for Interns. However, agencies have the discretion of providing specific training for its Interns. This information should be outlined in the Participant Agreement so you are aware of the requirements. If you know of training that will enhance your skills and will assist in your professional development, you should discuss attending the training with your supervisor. This information should be part of your IDP.

4. Rotational Assignments

Job rotation is the temporary movement of employees from one job to another within the organization or to another agency as a way to provide training, develop skills, and enhance career development. It helps you develop a broader understanding of other offices within your agency or another agency.

You may be eligible to participate in one- to six-month rotational assignments in your agency. Agencies may use these assignments to provide you with valuable knowledge, skills and experiences, and broaden your perspectives of the Federal Government.

If you are interested in a rotational assignment, you should discuss it with your supervisor. When seeking a rotational assignment, consider one that will enhance or develop competencies that are related to your career field. If you are not certain of the competencies, look on www.USAJOB.gov for similar positions and study the related competencies; especially, the technical competencies. Rotational assignments are not a requirement for the Internship Program. Supervisors have discretion in approving these requests.

5. Mentors

OPM recommends that agencies assign mentors to all Pathways participants. However, it is not a requirement for the Internship Program.

Mentors can be instrumental in your career development and growth. Mentors:

- Help with setting goals;
- Provide encouragement and feedback;
- Support professional growth and development;
- Help to build confidence;
- Advise you of new opportunities; and
- Provide guidance on applying best practices.

If you are not assigned a mentor, consider asking your supervisor for assistance in finding one. Think about finding a mentor in your field of interest. A mentor can provide valuable information on how to develop specific competencies that will help you grow in your career.

6. Schedules

You may work either part- or full-time schedules based on information stated in the job opportunity announcement and/or a discussion with your supervisor. Your work schedule should not interfere with your academic schedule or performance. It should allow for completion of both your academic and Program requirements in a reasonable timeframe. Your schedule must be documented in the Participant Agreement.

7. Performance Evaluation

Your supervisor will establish performance goals and evaluation criteria and meet with you to discuss work assignments and expectations. Each Pathways participant, regardless of the appointment duration, must be placed on a formal performance management plan. Formal evaluations are required for any appointments lasting 90 days or more. Your supervisor will provide performance feedback on a regular basis. Agencies should hold mid-year reviews and complete annual evaluations.

Part of your job as an Intern or Intern NTE is to stay abreast of the requirements of your job. Your performance standards/goals are the guide to track your progress. Seek out regular feedback from your supervisor to make sure you are on track. Also, use your IDP in conjunction with the performance plan to help map your progress and ensure your success in the Program.

8. Promotions

Interns NTE are not eligible for promotions. As an Intern, however, you may be promoted as long as you meet the qualification standards for the next higher grade level. If the position you occupy has no promotion potential, you will have to apply for a new position in order to be promoted. Be sure to read the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) on USAJOBS to see if you meet the requirements for the next grade level.

If you occupy a “career ladder” position, you may be promoted to the next grade level without further competition. You must perform satisfactorily at your current grade to be considered for the promotion. Your supervisor can explain to you what is expected to reach the next grade level.

9. Conversion Eligibility

In order for you to be considered for conversion to a permanent position, you must meet all academic and Pathways Program requirements as outlined in your Participant Agreement. Agencies have the discretion to consider Pathways Participants for conversion; however, it is not an entitlement.

If your agency decides to convert you, they must do so within 120 days of your degree completion date. If you are not converted within this time frame, then the agency must terminate your appointment. If you meet the requirements for conversion, you may be converted to a position within your employing agency or any other agency across the Federal Government. Meet with your supervisor to discuss the possibility of conversion well ahead of the completion of the Program and academic requirements.

Agencies are not required to find you a position if you have a desire to work at another agency. This is your responsibility.

To be eligible for conversion, you must:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Complete at least 640 hours (up to 320 hours can be waived by your agency if you have comparable prior internship or volunteer experience) of work experience acquired through the Program while enrolled as a half- or full-time degree- or certificate-seeking student;
- Complete a course of academic study, within the preceding 120-day period, at a qualifying educational institution conferring a diploma, certificate or degree;
- Meet the qualification standards for the position to which you will be converted;

- Receive a favorable recommendation by an official of the agency or agencies in which you served; and
- Meet all agency-specific requirements, as specified in the Participant Agreement.

B. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR

Supervisors are responsible for making sure the transition into your new role as a Pathways participant is smooth. They are responsible for developing and implementing a meaningful onboarding plan that ensures you:

- Complete and sign a Participant Agreement;
- Understand your Program requirements (e.g., Program length and training requirements);
- Understand what type of Intern you are – Intern or Intern NTE – and how this may impact your program requirements;
- Understand your work portfolio and how it supports the mission of the agency; and
- Understand what it will take to become eligible for conversion to a permanent employee.

Supervisors are also responsible for:

- Assigning meaningful work that supports agency needs and your academic field of study or career interests;
- Developing and implementing appropriate performance standards and evaluation criteria;
- Monitoring your performance and providing holistic feedback;
- Tracking your progress towards meeting academic and Program requirements and ensuring that you remain on track for Program completion and/or conversion.

Towards the end of the Program, your supervisor will determine whether you are eligible for conversion (if applicable) and notify you of his or her decision.

C. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. *If I get sick, can I take a break from the Program and come back?*

A break in your Program may be allowed only under certain circumstances. A break is a period of time in which you are working but unable to attend classes, or you are neither attending classes nor working. Your Participant Agreement should address the times in which a break may be considered. You can request a break based on what is specified in your Participant Agreement. Be mindful that the agency and your supervisor can exercise its discretion in approving these requests, in addition to determining the length of the break.

2. *If there is another Internship position in my agency that I am interested in, can I be reassigned to it?*

An agency that wants to reassign an Intern to another position (at the same grade level) must announce the position to the rest of the Interns in the agency that may be eligible for reassignment. You would then have to apply for the position and compete with other Interns.

3. *Are Interns considered Bargaining Unit employees?*

The Designation as a part of the bargaining unit (union) is determined by the employing agency and the union and is based on the position that the Intern holds. This information should be documented in your Participant Agreement, position description or personnel action. If you are not certain, ask your supervisor or human resources.

4. *If I go back to school after summer work and want to work in the same position during other breaks such as winter and spring, can my agency bring me back without having to reapply for the position?*

Yes. An agency can place you in a non-pay status while you attend school. However, if the agency terminates your appointment (or the appointment expires), the position must be announced again and you will have to reapply.

5. *Is there a limit on the number of times I can be appointed as an Intern?*

No. As long as you meet the eligibility requirements for the Pathways program and qualify for the position, you may be appointed to an Internship position. The Job Opportunity Announcement will specify the qualification requirements for the position, so be sure to read it carefully.

6. *If an Intern does not meet the requirement to remain in school, can they be removed from the Pathways program?*

Yes. An Intern **must** meet the definition of student (be enrolled or accepted for enrollment at least half-time at a qualifying institution) throughout the duration of their appointment. If you do not meet the eligibility requirements, the agency must terminate your appointment.

7. *Can my internship appointment time be extended if I am an Intern NTE?*

Intern NTE appointments may be extended in increments of up to one year when the agency determines that the need for temporary work will continue. The Intern NTE will be eligible for a possible extension by doing the following:

- Continuing to demonstrate progress toward the successful completion of your academic program within the timeframe indicated in your Participant Agreement;
- Remaining a student in good academic standing;
- Receiving a positive recommendation and/or evaluation; and
- Completing at least a half-time course load each term as determined by your educational institution.

8. *If a student is hired as an Intern with a not-to-exceed date (NTE), does the work performed need to be related to the student's academic area of study?*

No. Intern NTE positions are used to complete temporary projects, to perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject-matter expertise, or to fill traditional summer jobs. This work is not required to be related to your area of study.

9. *Must the Internship position (Interns without NTE) be related to the student's academic field of study?*

No. The Internship position must be related either to the student's academic field of study or the student's career interests.

10. *Can my appointment as a Pathways Intern be terminated?*

Yes. Agencies may terminate Pathways participants' appointment for misconduct, poor performance, or because they have been determined to be unsuitable for Federal employment. Various situations may result in the termination of participants. The following examples are merely illustrative and not meant to be all inclusive. Your appointment may be terminated if you:

- Do not maintain good academic standing, as defined by your educational institution;
- Do not provide proof of current academic status during the allotted timeframe and/or fail to maintain eligibility as a student; or
- Fail to meet any requirement set forth in your Participant Agreement.

D. SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

- **Express your career goals and expectations**

Schedule meetings with your supervisor to talk about your work and career development needs. Remember to be proactive and follow up with your supervisor. When your supervisor meets with you to discuss your work plan, ask questions such as:

- What skills and competencies do I need to acquire in this position?
- What are the deadlines for the project or assignment?
- How are you going to monitor progress?

Share your career interests and communicate any concerns early. Your supervisor can provide you with tips on how to reach the next steps in your career and personal development. They can send you to the appropriate trainings and give you assignments that will help in developing specific competencies. Supervisors typically have a substantial professional network that can be beneficial in helping you navigate your career path.

Take advantage of training opportunities, to include those that are free at your and other agencies. In addition to scheduled training, look on the internet or your agency's intranet for training opportunities at low or no cost. Your agency may be willing to send you to another Federal agency for training. Take the initiative to find these opportunities and present them to your supervisor for approval.

- **Use the IDP as a roadmap to reach educational, training, and development goals**

Your IDP is a tool to assist you in career and personal development. It helps you and your supervisor set expectations for specific learning objectives and competencies. The primary purpose of an IDP is to help you reach short- and long-term goals, as well as improve current job performance. It involves preparation and continuous feedback from your supervisor (and mentor). You should use the IDP to keep track of your professional developmental and training

activities. It allows you to measure your success in reaching each goal. The IDP is a working document and can be changed when needed.

- **Get regular feedback from your supervisor and colleagues about your performance**

It is important to know how well you are progressing in the program. You should have regular conversations with your supervisor to know whether there are areas in which you need to improve. You should take notes during these meetings. Be open to constructive criticism because it is only meant to help you improve your performance. Your co-workers can provide you with additional tips on where and/or how to increase your level of performance, if needed. They may be able to provide different feedback than your supervisor because they work more closely with you.

- **Demonstrate a "can do" attitude**

Demonstrate interest in learning new things and welcome assignments no matter how trivial they may seem. Tackle all assignments with enthusiasm. Take initiative and seek additional projects when appropriate and display a positive attitude.

- **Perform to the best of your ability**

For some Programs participants, this may be their first job. Whether that is the case, take time to understand the assignment and corresponding deadlines. When in doubt, ask your supervisor for clarification. You should request feedback from your peers on your work products before submitting them to your supervisor.

Seek out challenging assignments and special projects. You should volunteer for, or seek out complex assignments and opportunities in order to develop or enhance general and technical competencies. Speak with your supervisor about job shadowing and in-house detail assignments that will allow you to continue to develop your skills.

Look for opportunities to showcase special skills. For example, if you have good public speaking skills and your supervisor is seeking someone to conduct a short presentation for the office, you may want to consider volunteering for the assignment.

- **Be a team player**

Understand how your work fits with your team's performance goals. Attend your organization's events and network with staff from other divisions within your agency. As an Intern, you must establish connections with your colleagues early in your career. Internships provide you with opportunities to figure out career choices and decide if the organization is a good fit for you.

- **Choose a mentor**

A mentor could be a peer or someone from your agency in another office. A mentor guides you through the bureaucracy, informs you of internal policies, and serves as a sounding board for new ideas. Meet regularly with your mentor. Benefits of mentoring for agencies include increased employee performance, better retention, improved commitment to the organization, and increased knowledge sharing. Some agencies have a formal mentoring program available to employees, so ask your supervisor.

- **Prepare an Accomplishment Report**

Record assignments, progress reports, and keep track of completed projects. Save emails from staff and customers praising your work. These are important documents for your performance evaluations. Always be ready to answer the question "what do you do?" and, more importantly, "what have you accomplished?"

- **Network!**

Networking is about making connections and building enduring, mutually-beneficial relationships. It is also likely that within a group there will be those who have already been where you are today. Building relationships with people of varying levels and backgrounds can help you learn as well as avoid some of the common pitfalls they experienced. Remember, you are not just gaining exposure to the people you work with; you are building connections with their network too. If someone they know has a need that matches your skills, and if you have made an impression, you may get a referral.

IV. RECENT GRADUATES PROGRAM

The Recent Graduates Program is a dynamic, one-year developmental program that promotes careers in the Federal Government to recent graduates. Some agencies may have two-year programs based on occupation-specific criteria, approved by OPM. Individuals must apply within two years of receiving a qualifying degree or certificate, with the exception of certain veterans, who have up to six years to apply due to military service obligations. Students may also apply up to nine months prior to completing their academic requirements, pending agency-specific policies.

Participants in the Program receive training and professional development, complete an Individual Development Plan, and are assigned a mentor. Recent Graduates who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the Federal Government.

A. WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

The Recent Graduates Program provides developmental experiences in the Federal Government. It is intended to promote potential careers in the civil service to individuals who, within the previous two years, graduated from qualifying educational institutions with an associates, bachelors, masters, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree, or certificate from qualifying educational institutions. You will gain invaluable work experience that will help move you forward in your career.

1. Participant Agreement

Agencies must enter into a written agreement with each Pathways participant that they employ. This agreement is typically signed by an HR professional, hiring manager or supervisor, and the participant. The agreement must include expectations and define the following:

- A general description of the duties to be performed;
- Work schedule;
- Length of the appointment and termination date;
- Mentorship opportunities;
- Training requirements;
- Evaluation procedures;
- Requirements for continuation and successful completion of the Program;
- Minimum eligibility requirements for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service; and
- Any other requirements or expectations established by the agency.

Agencies have discretion to customize Participant Agreements for each of the Programs. While these documents must include certain elements, agencies have the flexibility to incorporate additional components into them). Refer to Appendix C for a sample Recent Graduates Participant Agreement.

2. Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Recent Graduates are required to complete IDPs within 45 days of their appointments. The Program provides structured training to ensure a meaningful developmental experience for participants.

The IDP is a formal plan, developed jointly by you and your supervisor. It is a strategic roadmap that you can use to create and track your career planning, professional development, and training activities. It should make note of a participant's target position, learning objectives and developmental requirements.

IDPs should be structured around the following elements:

- **Target Position or Portfolio:** A brief description of the target position or portfolio, and the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that will be needed to qualify for it upon successful completion of the Program.
- **Learning Objectives:** A description of general management areas, as well as specific technical skills and experiences.
- **Details and Timelines:** An overview of when and how the learning objectives will be met through participation in required trainings and other developmental activities.
- **Demonstrated Success:** A means for tracking the completion of all IDP objectives. The supervisor and participant are partners in determining whether the objectives set forth in the IDP have been met at the end of the Program.

3. Training and Development

You should be provided with at least 40 hours of formal interactive training per year (while in the Program) that advances the goals and competencies outlined in your IDP. Mandatory annual training (e.g., security and ethics training) does not count toward the 40-hour requirement.

Consider seeking out additional training and/or developmental assignments that enhance specific competencies related to your career field of choice. As a Federal employee, you may find no cost or low cost training on other agency websites; do your research to see what may be available.

4. Rotational Assignments

A rotational assignment is the temporary movement of an employee from one job to another within the organization or to another agency as a way to provide training, develop skills, and enhance career development. It helps you develop a broader understanding of other offices within your agency or another agency.

Recent Graduates may be eligible to participate in one- to six-month rotational assignments in their employing agencies or other agencies. Agencies may use these assignments to provide you with valuable knowledge, skills and experiences; broaden your perspective of the Federal Government; and aid in your retention. This can be done at your agency's discretion.

If you are interested in a rotational assignment you should discuss it with your supervisor. When seeking a rotational assignment, consider one that will enhance or develop competencies

that are related to your career field. If you are not certain of the competencies, look on www.USAJOB.S.gov for similar positions and study the related competencies; especially the technical competencies. Rotational assignments are not a requirement for the Recent Graduates Program, thus supervisors are not obligated to approve them.

5. Mentors

Mentors must be assigned to Recent Graduates within 90 days of their appointments. Mentors should be current agency employees, at the same grade level or above, outside of your chain of command.

You should be proactive in establishing an effective relationship with your mentor. Be open to corrective criticism and act on advice provided. Mentors can be instrumental in your career development and growth. Mentors:

- Help with setting goals;
- Provide encouragement and feedback;
- Support professional growth and development;
- Help to build confidence;
- Advise you of new opportunities; and
- Provide guidance on applying best practices.

If you are not assigned a mentor or cannot find one yourself, ask your supervisor if he or she can assist you in finding one. Having a mentor is a requirement for successful completion of the Recent Graduates Program.

6. Schedules

Recent Graduates are required to work full-time schedules. However, your tour of duty will be determined by your supervisor. If you have a specific tour of duty in mind, be sure to discuss it with your supervisor for consideration. Your schedule should be spelled out in your Participant Agreement.

7. Performance Evaluation

Agencies must establish performance goals and evaluation criteria for Recent Graduates. They should hold a mid-year review and complete an annual evaluation. Agencies are also expected to provide regular feedback and identify any deficiencies or areas of improvement for Recent Graduates.

You should fully understand the requirements of your position. If you are not certain of something, seek guidance from your supervisor. Your performance standards/goals are your guide to track your progress. Seek out regular feedback from your supervisor to make sure you are on track. Also, use your IDP in conjunction with the performance plan to help map your progress and ensure success in the Program.

8. Promotions

Recent Graduates may be eligible for non-competitive career ladder promotions and within-grade increases (WGIs) upon recommendation from their supervisors, and meeting qualifications determinations, satisfactory performance, and fulfillment of mandatory training requirements, as appropriate. Recent Graduates' promotions are not automatic nor are they guaranteed and depend on you and the quality of your on-the-job performance.

9. Conversion Eligibility

Recent Graduates are eligible for non-competitive conversion to term or permanent positions in the competitive service, provided that they have met all Program requirements. A Recent Graduate must be converted within her or his employing agency. However, conversion is not mandatory or guaranteed for participants.

If you are converted to a term position in the competitive service, you may subsequently be non-competitively converted to a career or career-conditional appointment without further competition. Your conversion must be made effective prior to the expiration of the term appointment. Your supervisor and/or Pathways Program Officer (PPO) can assist you in understanding your particular situation.

To be eligible for conversion, you must:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Complete at least one year of continuous service, in addition to all Program requirements;
- Demonstrate successful job performance consistent with the applicable performance appraisal program established under your agency's approved performance appraisal system that results in a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least "Fully Successful" or equivalent;
- Meet the OPM Qualification Standards for the competitive service position to which you will be converted;
- Meet any other agency-specific requirements outlined in your Participant Agreement; and
- Receive a recommendation for conversion from your first-level supervisor.

B. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR

Supervisors are responsible for making sure the transition into your new role as a Recent Graduate is smooth. Managers are responsible for developing and implementing a meaningful onboarding plan that ensures you:

- Take part in an orientation session;
- Complete and sign your Participant Agreement;
- Understand your Program requirements (e.g., Program length and training requirements);
- Understand your work portfolio and how it supports the mission of the agency;
- Complete an IDP to create and track your career planning, professional development, and training activities within 45 days of appointment;

- Are paired with a mentor outside of your chain-of-command within 90 days of appointment;
- Participate in a minimum of 40 hours of formal interactive training per year; and
- Understand what it will take to become eligible for conversion to a permanent employee.

Your supervisor is also responsible for the following:

- Assigning meaningful work that supports agency needs and your career interests, while providing progressively more responsible duties that allow for career advancement;
- Monitoring your performance and providing holistic feedback; and
- Tracking your progress towards meeting Program requirements and ensuring that you remain on track for Program completion and conversion.

Towards the end of the Program, your supervisor will determine whether you are eligible for conversion (if applicable). He or she will then notify you of the decision.

C. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. *If I find another Recent Graduates position at another agency, can I take that position?*

You may apply for and accept a new Recent Graduates appointment with another agency at any time during your appointment. The time you serve under the initial appointment counts toward the completion of Program requirements. Be mindful that you cannot have a break in service. In other words, if your original agency removes you from the rolls (staff of an agency) today, the other agency has to put you on their rolls tomorrow. Otherwise, you may be terminated from the Program.

2. *Can my agency require that I complete more than the 40 hours of training per year necessary for Recent Graduates?*

Agencies are required to provide a minimum of 40 hours of formal interactive training per year for Recent Graduates. Mandatory training such as Information Security and Ethics training do not count towards the 40-hour requirement. Agencies can establish additional training requirements for Recent Graduates. However, these requirements must be included in your Participant Agreement.

3. *Can my supervisor serve as my mentor?*

No. Mentors for Recent Graduates must be outside your chain of command.

4. *Can my appointment be terminated prior to completion of the Program?*

Yes. Agencies may terminate Pathways participants' appointment for misconduct, poor performance, or because they have been determined to be unsuitable for Federal employment. Various situations may result in the termination of participants. The following example is merely illustrative and not meant to be all inclusive. Your appointment may be terminated if you:

- Fail to meet any requirement set forth in your Participant Agreement.

D. SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

- **Create your own career plan**

Prepare a plan with career goals and objectives, including key milestones. Include areas to gain experience in leadership, project management, presentation skills, and creative and strategic thinking. Consider obtaining additional certifications, coursework, or degrees to advance your career. Also, think about how to develop the technical skills necessary for your career field. The IDP provides a good guide for you to follow. Set regular meetings with your supervisor and mentor, solicit feedback on assignments, and ask for direction from your mentor.

- **Show initiative**

Get to know your supervisor's expectations. Go beyond doing what is assigned to you. Look for ways to help your boss and your organization meet goals such as improve a system, simplify a process, or improve customer service. The best way to make a mark is to work hard, produce results, and make a difference in the way the organization accomplishes its mission.

- **Learn from your colleagues and be a team player**

Establish relationships with the subject matter experts in your organization; some of them may have institutional knowledge that is quite valuable. They can guide you and help you advance your creative and innovative ideas. Offer to help on a project because you never know where an assignment can take you.

Identify strategic relationships that will help you thrive in your current position. Introduce yourself to as many coworkers as possible and learn their roles. Do not hide in your office or telework all the time. You need to get your name out there and the best way is through interpersonal relationships.

Associate with top performers; they can be good mentors. On the other hand, avoid office gossip, complainers, and slackers.

- **Network!**

Networking is about making connections and building enduring, mutually-beneficial relationships. It is also likely that within a group, there will be those who have already been where you are today. Building relationships with people of varying levels and backgrounds can help you learn as well as avoid some of the common pitfalls they experienced. Remember, you are not just gaining exposure to the people you work with; you are building connections with their network too. If someone they know has a need that matches your skills, and if you have made an impression, you may get a referral.

- **Establish and exhibit a professional work ethic**

Send concise but informative emails to your supervisor on work assignments to show you are productive. Supervisors appreciate project status reports.

Respond to emails as soon as you can. If you need time to answer a specific inquiry, acknowledge receipt of the email and provide a timeframe for response. Customer service is a top priority in the Federal Government.

Do not miss work unless it is reasonable and necessary. Avoid tardiness and last minute notices requesting leave.

V. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Advanced Degree - a professional or graduate degree [e.g., Master's, Ph.D. or Juris Doctorate (J.D.)] from an accredited academic institution.

Appointment - any personnel action that brings an individual onto the rolls (staff) of an agency.

Break in Program - (applies to Interns and Interns NTE): A period of time in which an Intern is working but unable to attend classes, or is neither attending classes nor working. While breaks in program are not common, they are permissible in certain circumstances. If a break in program is needed, participants should speak with their supervisor.

Career Ladder - a position that allows one to move up the "ladder" towards a specified grade level, without competition. For example, a person selected for a GS-5 position with promotion potential to the GS-12 can be promoted to each intervening grade level from GS-5 to GS-12 as his/her knowledge and experience increases without competing with others. Individuals must perform successfully at the current grade to be considered for the next higher grade. The position description and job announcement should indicate the position's promotion potential, if any.

Certificate Program - post-secondary education at a qualifying educational institution, *equivalent to at least one academic year of full-time study* that is part of an accredited college-level, technical, trade, vocational or business school curriculum.

Competitive Service - all civilian positions in the Federal Government that are not specifically excepted from the civil service laws.

Individual Development Plan (IDP) - a document that serves as a strategic roadmap that employees can use to create and track their career planning, professional development, and training activities.

Intern - a current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is expected to last more than one year, typically through academic completion.

Intern Not-to-Exceed (NTE) - a current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is not expected to last more than one year.

Non-Competitive Conversion - the changing of an employee from one appointment to another appointment without competition in the same agency.

Participant Agreement - a required written agreement between every agency and Pathways participant that clearly identifies expectations, including a general description of duties, evaluation procedures, work schedules, and minimum eligibility requirements for conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service.

Pathways Participant - an individual appointed under one of the Pathways Programs. She or he must follow the Program requirements set out in her or his Participant Agreement.

Pathways Programs Officer (PPO) - an individual at each agency that is responsible for Program administration plans, including coordinating recruitment and onboarding processes, and ensuring that mentors are assigned, as appropriate, and IDPs are put in place.

Pathways Programs Supervisor - an individual who is responsible for managing a Pathways participant.

Recent Graduate - an individual who has been appointed to the Recent Graduates Program.

Term Appointment - an appointment made to a position in the competitive service for a period that is expected to last longer than one year, but no more than four years, when the need for an employee's services is not permanent.

Within-Grade Increase - Within-grade increases (WGIs) or step increases are periodic increases in a GS employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of his or her position to the next higher step of that grade.

VI. RESOURCES

A. TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)

The IDP is a tool that will assist you with planning career and personal developmental goals. Using an IDP is a systematic way of planning for training and gaining experience in order to develop the specific competencies you may need to grow professionally. Rather than haphazardly spending time and financial resources on what may or may not be useful activities or classes, the IDP gives both you and your supervisor the opportunity to set some developmental objectives and engage in those experiences that will support these objectives.

Think of an IDP as your career roadmap. It helps you to assess where you are right now, which allows you to determine where you want to go and how to get there. Consider it a “working document” and use it regularly to keep a record of completed developmental activities and to make changes in your work assignments, needs, or goals. If you change positions within or outside your agency, take your IDP with you and adapt it to your new position and any changes in your goals.

An IDP is extremely valuable because its development includes both your viewpoint and that of your supervisor. This is a chance for your supervisor to discover your goals and learn how you plan to attain them.

When developing your IDP, ask yourself these questions:

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be?
- How do I plan to get there?
- What skills do I possess?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?

The answers to these questions will help guide you through the goal-setting process. They will also help you to determine the developmental activities necessary to reach your goals. This is the cornerstone of your IDP. Determining measureable goals is critical to identifying the appropriate developmental activities. Your goals should be S.M.A.R.T.:

- **Specific** and clear so they can be understood;
- **Measurable**, in that you and your supervisor should be able to observe the completion of the goal;
- **Achievable**. You should challenge yourself but do not set unreasonable expectations. You should be able to accomplish the goals within the designated time frame;
- **Relevant** to your current position, agency goals, and/or other positions you hope to obtain; and
- **Time Bound**. Set realistic time frames in which to complete your developmental activities or goals.

Once you have thought about the aforementioned, you can draft your IDP for review with your supervisor, at which point you will get their input. You can then finalize it and begin your first activity or training session.

VII. CONCLUSION

Congratulations again on your appointment as a Pathways Intern or Recent Graduate! We recommend that you take the time to regularly review and reflect on the information in this Guide as you move through your Pathways program. If you have further questions or require additional information, consult with your supervisor or assigned mentor. Remember that your Pathways Program Officer is the main point of contact for additional information. You may also ask questions by sending an email to pathways@opm.gov. We wish you all the best for an exciting Pathways experience and a rewarding Federal career!

Appendix A
Recent Graduates Program
Individual Development Plan (IDP)



Name: _____ Plan Date: _____

Department/Office: _____ Office Phone: _____

Current Title/Series/Grade: _____ Email Address: _____

Supervisor's Name: _____ Supervisor's Title: _____

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is not a fixed document but one that you can enhance or modify over the course of the Recent Graduate Program. You are required to submit your IDP 2 times over the course of the 1-year program.

1. Within 45 days of your appointment
2. With your conversion package (due 60 days prior to your 1-year anniversary)

TARGET POSITION (Competitive Service position following successful completion of RG Program):

Position Title/Series: _____

Agency: _____ Department/Office: _____

Responsibilities of target position:

Qualifications of target position:

First Year:

| Activity | Competency/Learning Objectives | Date | |
|----------|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| | | Planned | Completed |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

SIGNATURES

Initial Plan Approval (due within 45 days of appointment):

| | | |
|--|---|---------------|
| _____ Typed Name of RG | _____ Signature of RG | _____ Date |
| _____ Typed Name of Supervisor | _____ Signature of Supervisor | _____ Date |
| _____ Typed Name of Department RG Coordinator | _____ Signature of Department RG Coordinator | _____ Date |

First Year Completion (due with conversion package – 60 days prior to 1-year anniversary):

| | | |
|--|---|---------------|
| _____ Typed Name of RG | _____ Signature of RG | _____ Date |
| _____ Typed Name of Supervisor | _____ Signature of Supervisor | _____ Date |
| _____ Typed Name of Department RG Coordinator | _____ Signature of Department RG Coordinator | _____ Date |

Appendix B Internship Program Participant Agreement



INSERT YOUR AGENCY'S LOGO

| | |
|--|---|
| Appointee's Full Name: | |
| Appointing Agency/Sub-Agency: | |
| Appointment Date (s): | Work Schedule: |
| Entrance on Duty (EOD) Date : _____ Appointment Not to Exceed (NTE) Date: _____ Program NTE Date: _____ | Monday _____ Tuesday _____ Wednesday _____ Thursday _____ Friday _____ |
| Position Title, Series and Grade | Pay |
| Intern's Responsibilities: | Hiring Official's/Supervisor's Responsibilities: |
| Provide proof of enrollment as necessary Notify the agency of any change in your enrollment status and/or work schedule Maintain at least a half-time course load as defined by the educational institution Remain in good academic standing Maintain a GPA of _____ and above (<i>Optional - Agency-specific</i>) Adhere to an established work schedule Adhere to the Internship Program requirements Participate in agency training classes or programs Perform, successfully, the assigned duties listed in your position description Observe all workplace rules | Complete a Participant Agreement with each Intern Verify enrollment and eligibility for continued participation in the Program Provide information on the Internship Program requirements Identify job duties and responsibilities Provide information on any special training requirements Identify performance goals and evaluation criteria Establish a mutually agreeable work schedule that does not interfere with the Intern's academic schedule Supervise daily work activities of the Intern If position offers conversion to the competitive service, identify the eligibility requirements for conversion and ensure your Intern is converted within the applicable timeframe (120 days from completion of all academic requirements). |
| Work Assignments (Enter brief description of duties or attach a position description) | |
| | |
| Program Requirements (Enter requirements for continuation and successful completion of Program) | |
| | |
| Training Requirements (If applicable) | |
| | |

Mentoring (If your agency has a mentor requirement for Interns, enter those requirements)

Evaluation Procedures. (Summarize elements on which the Intern's performance appraisal will be based)

Minimum Eligibility Requirements for Noncompetitive Conversion (if any). (Include any agency specific requirements)

To be eligible for conversion to the competitive service, an Intern must:

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Successfully complete academic course of study.
- Complete a minimum of 640 hours of work experience under the Internship Program.
- Meet the OPM Qualification Standard for the position the Intern may be converted to.
- Maintain acceptable performance under the agency's approved performance management system.
- Receive favorable recommendation for conversion from supervisor.

It is important to remember that eligibility for conversion does not guarantee that the agency will decide to opt for conversion.

SIGNATURES:

Intern:

Print Name

Signature

Date

Hiring Official/Supervisor:

Print Name

Signature

Date

Human Resources Approving Official:

Print Name

Signature

Date

Appendix C Recent Graduates Program Participant Agreement



INSERT YOUR AGENCY'S LOGO

| | |
|---|--|
| Appointee's Full Name: | |
| Appointing Agency/Sub-Agency: | |
| Appointment Date (s): | Work Schedule: |
| <p>Entrance on Duty (EOD) Date : _____ (MM/DD/YYYY)</p> <p>Program Not to Exceed (NTE) Date: _____ (MM/DD/YYYY)</p> | <p>Monday _____</p> <p>Tuesday _____</p> <p>Wednesday _____</p> <p>Thursday _____</p> <p>Friday _____</p> |
| Position Title, Series and Grade | Pay |
| Recent Graduate's Responsibilities: | Hiring Official's/Supervisor's Responsibilities: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to the Recent Graduate Program requirements Adhere to an established work schedule Perform, successfully, the assigned duties listed in your position description Participate in agency training classes or programs Create an Individual Development Plan (IDP) with assistance from your manager <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IDP must include at least 40 hours of formal interactive training IDP must be completed within 45 days of your date of hire IDPs must be created each year Select a mentor within 90 days of your date of hire. Your manager will assist you Attend regularly scheduled meetings with mentor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Participant Agreement with each Recent Graduate Provide information on the Recent Graduate Program requirements Establish a mutually agreeable work schedule Identify performance goals and evaluation criteria Help Recent Graduate create an IDP which must be completed 45 days from date of hire Assist Recent Graduate with the selection of a mentor within 90 days of date of hire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentor must be at an appropriate level outside of the Recent Graduate's chain of command Provide information on any special training requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure Recent Graduate participates in at least 40 hours of formal interactive training per year Supervise daily work activities Identify performance goals and evaluation criteria <p style="margin-top: 20px;">• If the position offers noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service, identify the eligibility requirements for conversion and ensure the Recent Graduate is converted at the end of the Program.</p> |
| Work Assignments (Enter brief description of duties or attach a position description) | |
| | |
| Recent Graduates Program Requirements (Enter requirements for continuation and successful completion of Program) | |
| | |

Recent Graduates Training Requirements (Identify any special training requirements)

At least 40 hours of formal interactive training each year.

Mentoring (Enter instructions on process to select Mentor)

Evaluation Procedures (Summarize elements on which the Recent Graduate's performance appraisal will be based)

Minimum Eligibility Requirements for Noncompetitive Conversion. (If this position offers noncompetitive conversion, enter any agency specific requirements)

To be eligible for conversion to the competitive service, the Recent Graduate must:

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Successfully complete all Recent Graduate Program requirements.
- Meet the OPM Qualification Standard for the position to which the Recent Graduate may be converted to.
- Maintain acceptable performance under the agency's approved performance management system.

It is important to remember that eligibility for conversion does not guarantee that the agency will decide to opt for conversion.

SIGNATURES:

Recent Graduate:

Print Name

Signature

Date

Hiring Official/Supervisor:

Print Name

Signature

Date

Human Resources Approving Official:

Print Name

Signature

Date



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Employee Services

1900 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20415

OPM.GOV